

VZCZCXRO8947
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHCO #0617 2251204
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 131204Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 9757
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHPC/AMEMBASSY LOME 3866
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
RUCOWCA/COGARD MIO EUROPE ROTTERDAM NL
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUCOCGA/COMLANTAREA COGARD PORTSMOUTH VA
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1141

UNCLAS COTONOU 000617

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (BANKS) AND AF/RSA
COGARD MIO EUROPE ROTTERDAM NL FOR LCDR KEITH
LOME FOR DCM J.A. DIFFILY
PARIS FOR D'ELIA

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [EINV](#) [ETRD](#) [EWWT](#) [PGOV](#) [KHLS](#) [PTER](#) [BN](#)

SUBJECT: PORT OF COTONOU: UPDATE ON DEMARCHE CONCERNING ISPS CODE COMPLIANCE

REF: A) Cotonou 561; B) Cotonou 389

11. (SBU) SUMMARY. At the request of the Mr. Armand Zinzindohou, Minister Delegate for Public Works in the Office of the President, the Charge d'Affaires, along with the Millennium Challenge Corporation Benin Acting Resident Country Director and the Coordinator of the Benin MCA Team, toured the Port of Cotonou along with Minister Zinzindohou, the General Director of the Port of Cotonou, and several other Government of Benin (GOB) officials on August 10, 2007. The GOB officials, who are clearly very concerned about the upcoming August 21 deadline for the Port of Cotonou to comply with the minimum requirements of the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code (Reftel B), wanted to show USG officials evidence of progress made since the July visit of U.S. Coast Guard (USCG) Commander Robert Keith (Reftel A). It was evident to the USG officials that much progress had been made, particularly with regard to fencing, lighting, and access control. In conversations with the Minister Delegate and in a meeting afterward, which was open to the press, the Charge d'Affaires expressed appreciation for the great effort that the GOB was making and for the progress that had been achieved, but emphasized that it would be the USCG which would make the final determination regarding the Port of Cotonou's compliance with the ISPS code. END SUMMARY.

12. After a brief meeting at the office of Christophe Aguessy, General Director of the Port of Cotonou, Minister Delegate Zinzindohou and Mr. Aguessy, along with an entourage of other GOB officials, escorted the Charge and the rest of the American delegation on a tour of the port. At the main entrance of the port, the Minister Delegate personally ordered several unauthorized vendors to leave the area, and gave detailed instructions on access controls. Here, as well as on several other occasions later on during the tour, he emphasized to Port of Cotonou employees the urgency of ISPS compliance and the great importance of the Port of Cotonou to the economy of Benin.

13. Inside the Port, the Minister Delegate spoke with workers, making sure that they were wearing their identification badges or armbands, and becoming angry when he came across a group of dock workers without identification badges. He engaged in an animated discussion with a representative of the transportation workers union, who claimed that slow customs inspectors and forwarding agents prevented the truck drivers from unloading their vehicles quickly, thus causing congestion in the port area. The union representative nevertheless thanked the Minister Delegate and the Port Director for their efforts, which he said had made the port safer for members of

his union.

¶4. The Minister Delegate then took the American delegation all around the perimeter of the port, pointing out improvements that had been made in fencing, new walls, and lighting. The Charge d'Affaires told the Minister Delegate that significant improvements had clearly been made in the last several weeks, particularly in the areas of access controls, security, reduced congestion, fencing, and lighting.

¶5. COMMENT: The intense personal involvement of Minister Delegate Zinzindohou demonstrates the depth of the GOB concern over the upcoming ISPS compliance deadline. While initial compliance efforts may have been somewhat lackadaisical, the GOB is clearly trying to make up for lost time, and is making a sincere effort to bring the Port of Cotonou into full compliance prior to the August 21 deadline. The Charge d'Affaires expressed appreciation for these efforts, but emphasized that the U.S. Coast Guard would make the final determination.

Lauterbach